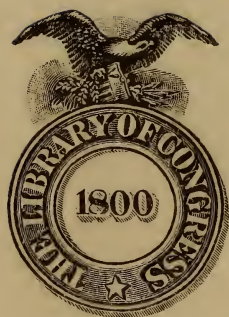


THE RELIGIOUS
VALUE OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT

by

AMBROSE WHITE VERNON



Class BS1171

Book V4

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT

The
RELIGIOUS VALUE *of*
the OLD TESTAMENT

in the Light of
Modern Scholarship

BY

AMBROSE WHITE VERNON

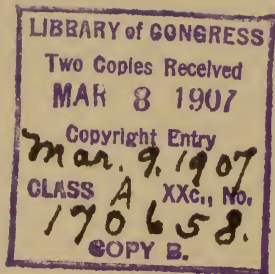
Professor of Biblical Literature in
Dartmouth College



NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
Publishers

1907

BS1171
V4



COPYRIGHT, 1907,
By THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHED, MARCH, 1907.

To

FRANCIS BROWN

STEADIER AND ENLARGER OF HUMAN LIVES

For rigorous teachers seized my youth,
And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,
Showed me the high, white star of Truth,
There bade me gaze, and there aspire.

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. The Change of Attitude to the Old Testament	I
II. The Older View of the Religious Value of the Old Testament	7
<i>A.</i> It establishes the existence of God and the divinity of Christ	
<i>B.</i> It gives infallible direction to the believer	
III. Defects of this Older View.	15
<i>A.</i> In failing to apprehend Old Testament religion	
<i>B.</i> In externalizing religion	
<i>C.</i> In begetting a trivial conception of God	
IV. The Untenability of the Older View	23
V. A Modern View of the Religious Value of the Old Testament	29
<i>A.</i> It presents characters supremely worthy of reverence	
<i>B.</i> It records the discovery of our fundamental religious truths	
<i>C.</i> It is essential to a correct apprehension of Jesus Christ	
VI. Conclusion	79

THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I

THE CHANGE OF ATTITUDE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is obvious that the attitude of the educated man to the Bible has undergone nothing less than a revolution. Instead of the authoritative pronouncement of Deity through arbitrarily chosen instruments, the Bible is now regarded as a great body of literature, one part differing from another part in glory. And the parts have been seen to be of far greater value than the whole. As the Bible lies before us, it is a misleading book. Both in the Old and in the New Testaments, the historical framework is untrustworthy. The ecclesiastical

2 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

writers of the Bible are no better historians and no more free from prejudice — to use no stronger word — than ecclesiastical writers generally. It is now clearly understood that the priestly authors and editors who are responsible for the final form of the Old Testament history, from Genesis to Chronicles and Ezra, thoroughly misconceived its movement and its meaning. And I think it is gradually being felt, though not so universally insisted upon, that the author of the Acts of the Apostles has reproduced in somewhat less flagrant manner the error of the Old Testament ecclesiastics. The ecclesiastical writers of the Old Testament wrote history from the view-point of the temple ritual and priesthood, and the author of the Acts was unduly influenced in his choice of material by the theories of the origin and unity of the Christian Church, which were current in his time. The result is unfortunate in two respects. In the first place, the really vital forces in the history of the Jews and the great conflicts in the history of the Apostolic Age are almost totally ignored. Had

it not been for the preservation of the writings of the prophets and of the letters of Paul, we should have been utterly unable to understand the actual historical development of the religion of Israel and of Christianity. In the second place, the writers push much too far back the establishment of the temple priesthood in the one case, and of churchly authority in the other. In the Old Testament this error of the priestly writers is so marked that even were there no similar tendencies among the prophetic school of historians, Wellhausen would be fairly justified in declaring that here "we have a religious history that shuts history out."

It is not too much to say that the theory of the Chronicler of the Old Testament and of the historian of the New Testament, so far from being an accurate guidepost to the historical student, is rather a protecting shell which has to be broken through to find the meat. It is just the material which had least value to these historians and which was preserved only through a reverence for the past —

4 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

such as the ancient stories of David, tucked in at the end of Samuel, the strong ringing strophes of the minor prophets, and the parables of Jesus, preserved in Mark as examples of spiritual mysteries (!) — which constitute for us the most precious treasures of the Bible. And so it has come to pass that the attention of men is being diverted from the Bible as a whole, that is to say from the Bible as an oracle, to the separate writings of which it is made up.

But it is plain that the great literary power of the Bible will be lost to us, unless its religious power may somehow be retained. The books of the Bible which make the strongest literary appeal are precisely those which are epoch-making in religion. The permanence of their literary influence must in the last analysis depend upon the value of their religion. We may keep the Bible on a remote shelf of our libraries in any case; its historical interest and significance assures that; but if we are to keep it on our study tables, we must believe in and live upon its religion. Now the portion of our Bible that has seemed to be in the

greatest danger of being put upon the shelf through the influence of the keen criticism of recent years is the Old Testament. Notwithstanding far-reaching discoveries in the field of New Testament criticism, the supreme character of Jesus has been more and more clearly recognized as the great inspiration of mankind, and the first three gospels as the most immortal of books. We are dealing, then, with what in one aspect is the most critical question in regard to the future of the Bible, if we ask ourselves if modern research and scholarship have destroyed or enhanced the religious value of the Old Testament.

For whether for good or ill, it seems indisputable that the large results of modern scholarship have become thoroughly established. In the more important matters a striking agreement has been reached by the leading biblical scholars of Germany, England, and America. It would expand this essay into too large a book to marshal the proof of even the main contentions, of scholars like Wellhausen and Duhm in Germany, Robertson Smith and Driver in

6 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

England, George Moore and Henry Preserved Smith in our own country. Suffice it to say that the standpoint of this essay is the standpoint of these men and of the men they represent, and that its object is to show that the most outspoken modern scholarship ministers to our religious needs and to the appreciation of the supreme religious value of the Old Testament. I do not mean to say that modern scholarship has not altered our conception of the religious value as well as of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, — we shall begin the consideration of our subject by pointing out the great difference of view that it necessitates, — I only mean to say that the gain far exceeds the apparent loss.

II

THE OLDER VIEW OF THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LET me first, then, attempt to set forth the chief religious value of the Old Testament to the older scholarship and to that scholarship, not as it has been modified in the last one hundred years, but before biblical criticism changed its attitude of awe for an attitude of sympathy.¹

To the older scholarship the Old Testament was religiously valuable chiefly in two ways: first, it served as one of the most important proofs for the existence of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ, and second, it gave men infallible directions in regard to faith and conduct. We must consider these two great services in turn.

We cannot follow in detail the proof of the existence of God which the Old Testament af-

¹ Cf. Martineau, "The Rationale of Religious Inquiry," 1836.

8 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

forded the fathers, but it was chiefly threefold. It consisted in the miraculous interventions in the course of Jewish history, in the revelation of future events to the Jewish prophets, and in the early and authoritative proclamation of the perfect morality. Some, if not all, of the older divines and scholars insist that of these three proofs the first two are of decidedly greater value. They point out that they are more distinctly divine, less open to any human admixture, and that they have a wider appeal. A moral law impresses only moral people, whereas a miracle convinces the wicked as well as the good. And certainly if it can be established that the dew fell one night on Gideon's fleece and not upon the ground, and that the next night it fell on the ground and not upon the fleece, and if it may be further proved that it all happened because Gideon asked God to have it so, the circumstance—particularly when supported by many other similar occurrences—proves the existence of God much more easily than the delivery of the ten commandments to Moses, or certainly more easily than the content of the commandments.

The only thing requisite is to be sure that the miracles actually happened. Of this the older theologians were convinced, because the infallible Bible said so. And the Bible was proven to be an infallible book by the remarkable fulfilment of its most detailed and most mysterious prophecies about the future of Israel and of Israel's foes. Further, over and over again in this book were to be found — as in no other with which our fathers were acquainted — passages of the highest spiritual quality introduced by the solemn "Thus saith the Lord." These passages naturally inspired reverence for the book in which they were found, and from the earliest time it was the universal belief that the very accounts of the miracles themselves were from the mouth of the Lord, written only at the hand of some amanuensis. The infallible book proved the actuality of the miracle, which in turn proved the existence and the power of God.

The divinity of Christ also was proved, not by the words of his mouth or the meditations of his heart, but to a very large extent by the

Old Testament prophecies of his coming. It was, indeed, always felt that the prophecies that concerned themselves directly with him were meagre and hazy, but this very haze was accounted to be an evidence of that God who hideth himself and whose ways are not our ways. A God who could wipe out whole cities at his word and who could tell Abraham the exact hour of their destruction could be mysterious about the sending of his Son if he so elected. There was enough that was clear to impress "the fickle and the frail," and enough that was covered to necessitate and to repay the theologian. In this latter category the ritual occupied a prominent place; in itself it had no meaning; it was ridiculous to have so many sacred pages filled with the description of mere temporary rites; it was the province of the theologian to prove that they constituted a detailed symbolic prophecy of the atonement on Calvary. Hence there arose the sacred science of typology, which supplemented the meagreness of the direct Messianic prophecies. Side by side herewith, the theologian followed the

lead of the writers of the gospels in discovering numerous hidden references to Christ where a casual reader would not suspect them. This allegorical interpretation of Scripture ran riot in the early days of the Church and was in great favor much more recently than we care to think. It was supposed to be a special gift of the Spirit, who thereby enabled his favorites to find the spiritual significance of seemingly secular events. Thus was much of the Old Testament redeemed from its worldliness and made tributary to the revelation of Christ, and to the establishment of his deity.

But allegorical interpretation is invariably an interpretation of an oracle. It was, therefore, but a short step from searching for hidden references to Christ to searching for hidden counsel for one's personal life. The historical sense was completely ignored,—at first on principle, at length as a matter of course. The Bible became a vast storehouse of moral and spiritual food, equally nutritious for all ages, and for all circumstances. Many a saint in

12 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

perplexity would open his Bible for direction, and would twist the passage to which he opened until he found the guidance he sought. And even where this was not done, the "devotional" reader would be constantly expecting some spiritual refreshment to shoot forth from the ritual of Leviticus or the narratives of the Kings. Samson's riddle became only one of a vast number. The Old Testament became an oracle like the books of the Sibyl or the utterances from Delphi. Any one of God's children could hear him speak to him personally, simply by opening the pages of the Old Testament, or as it was preferably called, The Word of God.

It would be utterly absurd for descendants of the Puritans to deny that this conception of the Old Testament had distinct religious value. It made men certain of the existence of God and of the divinity of Christ. It kept everyday life open to the illumination of God's counsel. It held men in the control of God. It cannot be gainsaid that with the weakening of this conception, large numbers of men are losing the encouragement and the consolation

of religion. The old divines were right in saying that a moral argument appealed only to moral men. Where a man is devoid of spiritual insight, it will be much harder to prove to him the divinity of Jesus from the supremacy of his character than from a detailed prophecy of his coming, death, and resurrection, hundreds of years before.

Again, the character of the prophets is a less direct proof of the existence of God, and, therefore, of men's accountability to him, than the staying of the sun by Joshua, or of the processes of a whale's digestion for Jonah. It would appear that not only perfect love but imperfect conviction of God casteth out fear of him. It seems patent that the absolute certainty of God is passing away from very large numbers of men. The world of Western civilization appears to be entering on a curious epoch. It has been accustomed to irreligion in the intellectual circles; now it seems that irreligion is rather to have its seat among the masses. The problem of the immediate past has been with the educated; the problem of the

14 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

present is with the indifferent, because unconvinced, laboring classes. They could find God in an infallible church or in an oracular book; now they "wander from sea to sea," but without even "seeking the word of the Lord,"—so sure are they that "they shall not find it." In the face of this threatening disaster, we are able to appreciate the religious value of the Old Testament of the fathers.

III

DEFECTS OF THIS OLDER VIEW

BEFORE we turn from the Old Testament of our fathers to the Old Testament of our critics, we must in fairness point out three serious limitations in our fathers' view. First, the conception of the Old Testament as the inerrant record of the miraculous and the infallible oracle for all generations prevented men from apprehending the actual religion of the authors and heroes of the Old Testament. Even in the historical books, the search for the miraculous blinded men's eyes to the simple and affecting greatness of a Saul or of a David and to their crude beliefs and fears. The significance of the demand of Elijah for the exclusive worship of Jehovah, fraught with such untold consequences, was quite overlooked in favor of the cruise of oil and the mysterious chariot and the wonder-working mantle.

This defect is most plainly exhibited in the estimate of the prophetic books. They were valued almost exclusively for the predictions they contained. The figures of the prophets themselves were but slightly individualized and their struggles and problems commanded no sympathy; they were hardly known to exist. Only in very recent times has it been discovered that the greatest of the prophets were poets, and delivered their messages from Jehovah in lyric poetry of exquisite beauty and of unparalleled strength. There was a lamentable ignorance of the very portions of Scripture which have been shown to be of the highest literary power. And as literature is not only an outcome, but in large measure an index, of life, we are forced to suspect that the older theologians had no real understanding of Old Testament religion. It was precisely the most vital parts of the book for which they had no inner sympathy. And the suspicion is confirmed by the reconstruction of history which modern criticism has made. Through it we have discovered that the creators of the Israelitish religion are not so much Abra-

ham and Moses as Amos and Hosea and Jeremiah and the unknown authors of Deuteronomy and of some of the later chapters of the Book of Isaiah.

The prevalent opinion among scholars is that the ten commandments, instead of being handed to Moses on Sinai, are the crystallization of the insight of the great prophets of Israel. We have found that what gave power to the strophes of Amos and Hosea was the sense of declaring to Israel what they perhaps thought was forgotten, but what was at any rate unknown, moral and spiritual truth. We have learned that the religion of the Old Testament, was neither the religion of the Protestant theologians nor even of the New Testament. It was in such a constant state of development that to speak of the religion of the Old Testament as though it were a fixed quantity, is a misleading use of language. In reality, Hebrew religion did not become monotheistic until shortly before the fall of Samaria.

The only glimpses of immortality in the Old Testament come from the two centuries pre-

ceding Christ, and Old Testament religion never lost its national character. For a long time its chief representatives sought God exclusively through ritual and the casting of lots, worshipped him with the help of images and regarded national exaltation as his highest reward. Hebrew religion was raised to its unique place only through the inner experiences of the wonderful succession of men, of whose hearts and hopes and lonely, steadfast faith the theologians of the Reformation had no apprehension. The first great defect, then, of the older view is its failure to realize the religion of the men of the Old Testament, and thereby to appreciate that our religion was the outcome of centuries of struggle after God.

This emphasis on miracle and prophecy on the part of our fathers made also for the externalization of religion. It is indeed strange to find emphasis on Israelitish prophecy making for such a result, but we must remember that prophecy was regarded by the old theologians as prediction. This prediction had to do largely with external events that could easily be verified

by the morally obtuse. The predictors themselves, moreover, were chosen without especial regard to their moral attainment, as was peculiarly evidenced in the case of Balaam. To have faith in God meant not to appropriate his holiness but to believe in his existence and power. It was the fact rather than the character of God that was of supreme importance. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ meant, not to understand what God intended man to be, but rather to be confident that the worth of Christ's sacrifice balanced our account with the Almighty. It was the cross rather than the heart of Jesus that was the centre of Christianity. With this external view of God and of Christ, it followed that eternal life was a mark of duration rather than of quality. What was acquired by this intellectual — that is, external — acceptance of God and Christ was an assurance of pleasurable existence after death. In some most rigidly orthodox quarters, religion became synonymous with belief.

But the most serious religious defect in this method of regarding the Old Testament was the

trivial conception of God that went with it. God was supposed to have found in an unchanging book a completely adequate medium for revealing himself to men. He had need of no further avenue of communication. Spirit had deposited itself in letters. The Bible was the surrogate of God. To commune with the Almighty, let man dig out the hidden meaning of infallible words. A God that was to be found in such fashion was of necessity a trivial God.

The nature of the letters, moreover, in which God had, as it were, deposited himself, increased the triviality of his character. For, as we have seen, the only way in which long stretches of Chronicles and the Song of Songs and Leviticus could be considered worthy of being the speech of any God at all was to regard them as conveyers of a hidden spiritual meaning. Even the older theologians were sure that for a final and exclusive communication of God to men, there was too much in the Old Testament about buying wells and measuring altars and describing meats. Hence it was generally assumed that these passages

were intended to convey subtle mysteries of redemption. This assumption not only relieved the speech of the Almighty from seeming lapses, but gave him back again that mystery which he had surrendered to the clear-cut letters of the Bible, and which men must needs feel about their God. Thus the obscurity of his verbal revelation was made to match the obscurity of Providence, and in a double sense he was felt to be "a God that hideth himself." But this human method of investing Jehovah with mystery only increases our sense of his inadequacy. He is freed from insisting on the exact measurements of furniture only by being made a lover of riddles. His message to men was thought to be more adequately conveyed in plays upon words than in the mountains and the stars or in the heart of man.

Revelation was thus regarded as something quite unnatural and unrelated to the currents of the inner life. Only through artifice could God reveal himself to his creatures; even his Son must be accredited by hidden solutions

of prearranged conundrums. No wonder that for the simple trustful reverence of Jesus there was substituted the belief on the "mysterious" dogma of the Trinity. No wonder, further, that God was supposed, by processes akin to magic, to reveal to men definite directions of an arbitrary kind when they found themselves in trifling perplexities. Aaron was not allowed to enter the holy of holies oftener than twice a year; even the Sibylline books on the Capitoline were consulted only at explicit command of the Senate; the God of the older theology, however, could always be consulted through the biblical oracle at all times, for all causes, by all persons. Superstition easily usurped the place of reverence. The God of an oracle is always to be preferred to no God at all, yet he is not a God of order but of confusion, and he is far removed from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest evil of an infallible Bible is the worship of a trivial God.

IV

THE UNTENABILITY OF THE OLDER VIEW

BUT with its good and ill alike, our fathers' view of the Bible has been found untenable. It cannot, of course, be said to have been actually disproved. There is no possibility of overturning by proof so subjective a belief as the belief in the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Every contradiction, every false statement, may be set aside simply by asserting that the obvious sense of the passage has nothing to do with the real significance thereof. But it can be said that, in the light of common sense and science and comparative religion and historical criticism, this method of biblical interpretation has been discarded by nearly all educated men.

Where this view has been given up, and men have approached the pages of the Old Testament to discover the simple meaning of its writers, it is well-nigh universally admitted

that the Bible is not an infallible book. At many an important crisis in the history of the Jews, different, and, in some cases, directly conflicting, accounts have been discovered, sometimes side by side, sometimes dovetailed together by an ancient and anxious editor. As both of two opposing accounts cannot be true, the theory of biblical inerrancy must be abandoned. It is only necessary to instance the two narratives of creation or of the conquest of Canaan or of the origin of the monarchy in Israel to refute it. Being compelled to reject the infallibility of the Old Testament, we can no longer prove the fact of the existence of God by the citation of its miracles. Unless we have a supernatural record, we cannot be sure of the reality of supernatural events. It has, moreover, been observed that the accounts of the most stupendous biblical miracles are usually much later — in some important cases, as in the narratives of the Patriarchs and of the Exodus, centuries later — than the times in which these wonders are reported to have occurred. Great providential deliverances, such,

for instance, as the deliverance of Israel in the time of Hezekiah, though they still stand out in all their impressiveness, are explainable by quite natural causes.

Nor does prophecy come out more unscathed from the fires of modern historical criticism. It has been found to be essentially a forthtelling rather than a foretelling. Not that the element of prediction is absent, — many modern writers have erred at this point, — but the prediction of doom is based on moral failure, and the prediction of glory on faith in the love of God and in the endurance of his kingdom. In other words the predictions are expressions of the moral insight of majestic men who spake as they were moved, not by a magic, but by the Holy, Ghost.

Wherever this judgment passes from the general to the specific, we find unfulfilled, as indisputably if not as frequently as fulfilled, prophecy. It is only necessary to mention the predictions of the restoration and confederation of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in Palestine.¹ And at the most important point

¹ Hosea 1¹¹, Jer. 50⁴, Ezek. 37^{15 ff.}

of all, the prophetic argument is a complete failure. It is simply impossible to establish from it the divinity and the Messiahship of Jesus. A careful study of the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament shows that, while a small minority of the prophets anticipated a personal "Messiah," no one of them anticipated a figure like that of Christ. The only possible exception to this statement is the author of the marvellous fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, but it is probable that in the "Servant of Jehovah" he was personifying the nation of Israel. Jesus referred most sparingly to predictions of himself in the Old Testament; it was the evangelists, and more particularly Matthew, that made good this omission.

And typology, so elaborately developed and systematized, is the weakest of all reeds to lean upon. On the one hand, the ritual on which it is based is found either to be similar to that of the other Semitic nations or to be borrowed from the ritual of Baal; and on the other hand, it is found to have been elaborated in the more degenerate times of Jewish history and to have

been one of the chief objects of prophetic denunciation. The best that can be said for the ritual of the Old Testament in its most developed and purified form is that it preserved a great religion through times too formal and too worldly to appreciate it. We should regard the "divinely ordained" ritual, not as the highest prophecy of the Messiah, but rather — as ritual always is — as an evidence of religious stagnation. Jesus ignored it almost completely. In his presence, anise and cummin ceased to be important. It is nothing but the simplest truth to say that if we were left to the Old Testament to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, we should no longer be able to accept him as our Lord.

And it perhaps should be added that the "thus saith the Lord's" of the Old Testament have lost in impressiveness through the discoveries of the archæologists. We have found the king of Moab as sincerely believing in the power and direction of his god, Chemosh, as did the Israelite in that of his God, Jehovah. There was dug up but the other day a code of laws, almost identical in some of its statutes

with the code of Moses, antedating it by over a thousand years. The stone, moreover, upon which the code is inscribed, is headed by a picture of its author, Hammurabi, either in the act of receiving the law from his god,—in a similar fashion to that of Moses,—or indicating by the posture of worship that the inspirer of the code was a greater than man. And so we have come to regard the solemn formula of the prophets, not as an evidence of a unique experience, but as the expression of the sincere conviction of honest men, whose conviction has been paralleled frequently, that they were under the guidance of Deity. In many other respects, illustrated, for example, in the borrowing of the material underlying the stories of the creation and of the flood from the Babylonians, we find the Old Testament to be one of a class, rather than an absolutely unique volume. It is not the only sacred book of the nations; it is simply the sacred book of the Jews, which many of us, however, believe is destined soon to be a part of the sacred book of mankind.

V

A MODERN VIEW OF THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Now, it is maintained both in rigidly orthodox quarters and in quarters where they spell modern with a capital "M," that with this abandonment of the infallibility of the Old Testament its religious significance is exhausted. And it must be frankly admitted that we can no longer regard it as a demonstration of the existence of God to immoral men, nor as a demonstration of the divinity of Christ to those unattracted by his person. Nor is this an altogether unmixed evil. We instinctively recall the words of Paul, the first grave heretic, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are spiritually discerned," and the unequivocal words of Jesus, "Why doth this generation seek a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation," and again, "The kingdom of

God cometh not by observation." It may prove that the coming of that kingdom is not so much impeded as we fear by the diminution of that large class who "believe and tremble." Be that as it may, I am very confident that the Bible, and specifically the Old Testament, may still with gratitude and reverence be hailed as "the anchor of our purest thoughts, the nurse, the guide," in some measure even "the guardian of our hearts." And, indeed, the relation of the Old Testament to the religious man is not unlike the relation which nature bore to the rare soul of Wordsworth. It is that constant element — objective, if you will — of great and sublime beauty, which suggests and inspires those abiding visions of the Eternal, which are "the soul of all our moral being." It is the fixed mountain peak, from which a soul, if it ascend on a clear day, may catch sight of "the hills where its life rose" and a faint suggestion at least "of the sea where it goes."

This essay would sadly outgrow its limits, and overtask its author, should it attempt to set forth thoroughly the religious values of

the Old Testament, which criticism has either confirmed or uncovered. It will be best to confine our attention to three fundamental services which the Old Testament, in the modern understanding of it, is destined to render to men of our time.

The first great and permanent service that the Old Testament renders to a man is that it presents to him personalities worthy of the profoundest reverence. The beginning of all ethical religion is the awakening of reverence. This is occasioned by contact with persons of moral earnestness and religious insight. For all of us our religion began with the initial trust we reposed in our parents. But both they and our personal friends are too close to us to call out that reverence for character, detached completely from its worth to ourselves, that is distinctively religious. The Old Testament affords even the most unfortunately circumstanced among us characters which are so great, and whose greatness lies so patently in their relation to God, that we are inevitably led to ascribe to them supreme worth. Of all ages

and of diversest gifts, they stand out more plastically than the apostles and more massively than the heroes of other races. It is the patient scholarship of our time that has rendered their individualities intelligible and self-consistent. It has set them in their proper historical environment and has separated the later narratives of their doings from the earlier ones. It has made plain to us the greatness of these men. It has shown that greatness to consist in their loyalty to the highest ideals of their time, in the zeal with which they performed their divinely ordered tasks, and, above all, in a religious insight which enabled them to live just enough beyond their time to lead it forward toward ours. Their problems and their capacities have been sufficiently disclosed to us to convince us that God spoke to them more plainly than he speaks to us, but only because they had a greater faith, a deeper loyalty to right, and a more unconscious devotion to their race than we. There is no reason why our time should not be as close to God as theirs. There is nothing that has brought it closer than this discovery of its possibilities.

Out of the large number of men which inspire our reverence, let us take David for an example. Modern scholarship has given us the background necessary to an appreciation of his remarkable character. We shall never make anything out of David unless we remember that he belonged generically to Oriental despots. He had a large harem, he cast lots superstitiously in the deciding of grave questions, he did not hesitate to exact a bandit's booty because he had kept his men from stealing sheep, he made the inhabitants of conquered towns pass under saws and hammers and through the terrible brick-kiln. He does not satisfy the lowest standards of to-day; but if we understand his time, he comes before us as nearer God than many a man of higher standards.

Of course, as long as we conceive such a man, so cruel and so sensual, to be the author of the exquisite twenty-third Psalm, it is impossible to regard him as self-consistent or to allow his personality any save a sentimental influence over our lives. His ode on the death of Saul gives us the key to his character. While it

makes no explicit mention of Jehovah, it reveals a superb loyalty to a king that unjustly sought his very life and a love passing that of women for the friend of his youth. He did not worship the God of the prophets though he had the same name for him; he was not capable of so exalted a conception; but his personality did much to create the ideals of manhood that supported such a conception. Even to this day fraternal societies can find no loftier type of brotherhood than his affection for Jonathan, nor Christian ministers higher words of consolation to parents in bereavement than those in which this semi-barbarian expressed his submission to Deity. His care for his parents, his decree that those who stayed by the stuff should share the spoil with those that had been in the thick of the fray, his unchangeable affection for the son he knew was a traitor, — all these were the highest manifestations of the virtues of his day.

But the depth of his own loyalty led him to religious conceptions in advance of those of his time. He had the power of discrimination in

ritualistic values, so much more important in his day than in ours. He did not hesitate an instant to eat holy bread to save his life, or to defy the wrath of an angry plague-sending God for the marvellous mother-love of Rizpah; but he risked death rather than slay the Lord's anointed, though a king was something quite new to Israel and without any traditional sanctity. He had an inner standard by which he instinctively tested the elements of the religion of his time. Perhaps his highest moment was when he sent back the sacred ark to Jerusalem, then in possession of his son, Absalom, with words which seem to have pushed the human race leagues along in its search for God: "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will show me again both it and his habitation; but if he say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do as seemeth good unto him." He would not risk the home of Jehovah upon the rectitude of his rule; he still thought of him as residing in ark and city; but the consciousness of his unswerving loyalty to God led him to

hope that somehow God, whose holiest dwelling was with his enemy, would find a way to be loyal to him.

Thus was the insight of his steadfast heart keen enough to pierce the theology of centuries and to break through the weight of custom, "heavy as frost and deep almost as life." The very man who at the beginning of his career besought Saul to permit him to stay in Judah, that he might not be cut off from the only soil upon which God could be worshipped, learned through the profound qualities of his own spirit, that *its* God is not confined to any dwelling-place however sacred it be. It is not theoretical speculation, but the experience of an untutored barbarian of large heart and of tumultuous life, that gave rise to the first words that shine with "the peace that passeth understanding." When the modern man of culture bows before a hero of barbaric times, he has a glimpse of eternal values.

Or take once more, before we leave this portion of our subject, the grandest personality of the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah. I

wish there were space to rehearse the story of his life as it lies so confusedly but so grandly outlined in his great prophecy. It is a story too subtle, too emotional, too inwardly tumultuous, to abbreviate with success. I can only hope to direct some readers — perhaps under the guidance of Duhm or Cornill — to an intelligent study of the prophecy which, though complicated by additions from later ages, has still the power to bring us into touch with a man in whom faith achieved one of its most notable victories.

Jeremiah was a country priest, timid and desiring solitude. "A lodging place for wayfarers in the wilderness" was his idea of happiness. The first part of his life fell in the time of Josiah, who was the leader in one of the most radical religious revolutions known to history, and yet we hear no single word of this from Jeremiah. His soul was untouched by it. During its progress he received his call from God through an intense inward persuasion of the coming destruction of his people. To a people that had passed through the throes of

a religious transformation, and who thought themselves reformed, he was constrained to proclaim the displeasure of God because of their ineradicable iniquity; to a people casting wildly about for some means of maintaining their independence, he proclaimed that it was Jehovah's will that they should submit to haughty Babylon. It was a message foredoomed to rejection, a message that the utterer would fain have left unspoken, a message that exposed the messenger to continuous obloquy. But it was a message that had taken complete possession of his soul. The only dim hope he saw for his people lay in their readjustment of their national ideals to the inevitable, with the immovable conviction that God was behind it. He realized the insuperable difficulties of persuading a self-satisfied populace to rise to a faith so heroic and so indefinite. But he regarded himself as the mouthpiece of the Almighty. He was beyond his own control. From the call to deliver such a message he shrank at the outset, but he was over-mastered by the Omnipotent. "O Lord," he cries, "thou hast enticed

me and I was enticed; thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed." He excuses his course to his diary thus, "If I say, I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart a burning fire shut up in my bones and I am weary with forbearing and can no longer be still." So with eyes open to the consequences and with a heart open to God, he proclaimed, in season and out of season, his message of gloom. When the nation was at peace and gathered for worship, when the king was plotting with Egypt against the Babylonian inevitable, when the very armies of Bablyon surrounded the city and the whole populace was aroused for its defence, in his native town, in private before the weak and unstable Zedekiah or among his two or three disciples, in public in the very guard room where the soldiers were preparing for war against the Babylonian advance, — everywhere and at all times he thundered forth his message. Over and over he was arrested, imprisoned, made fast in the stocks; once he was thrown into the lowest dungeon to sink in the mire; for a long period he

was threatened with death by his own townsmen. Through all contumely he remained steadfast. At last, as he had predicted, the arms of Babylon were successful; and the conquerors, on hearing of his course, treated him with marked distinction. While his revilers received the due reward of their deeds, the man who had done nothing amiss was offered a career of prominence in Babylon.

But the prophet refused to believe that the enjoyment of such luxury and repose was the purpose of his vindication. Turning his back unhesitatingly on all such preferment, with great joy he undertook to live in Palestine with a remnant of Israel which was not worth the while of Babylon to deport, but from which he expected to see the new Israel arise. His hope, however, was short-lived. The new Babylonian governor of Palestine was murdered by a fanatic. Fearing that the crime would be laid to their charge, the Jews of Palestine, thoroughly terrified, sent a delegation to Jeremiah, whom events had accredited as a true prophet, to receive the word of God. After many days of waiting,

they received from him the message God had finally vouchsafed; they should remain in the land of Jehovah and trust in his protection. Their fears had increased, however, during the delay, and in spite of the counsel of Jeremiah, they moved out in solid ranks to that Egypt which had constantly lured them to ruin.

The new Judea for which he had toiled and in which he had believed was not to be. The men of Israel may have hoped that with a favorable Egyptian alliance their independence might be restored. Or they may have abandoned all ambition for the sake of comfortable living in Egypt. In any case they were more interested in themselves than in righteousness. But even with this outlook, the prophet was true to his message. He went in duress with these people to Egypt rather than as governor of others to Babylon. The last glimpse we have of him is of a man prophesying in Egypt the universal sway of Babylon as a part of the plan of Jehovah. He was faithful unto death, a death so obscure that its time and place are unknown. But from him the world learned

what every attentive reader of his book still feels, the unmatched grandeur of faith in performance of a duty whose utility is hidden from men's eyes.

It is difficult to overestimate the effects in the history of the inner life of mankind that reverence for the character of Jeremiah has produced. The truth of his insight and the nobility of his faith so impressed the Jews that his words were carefully preserved as words of Jehovah. In their own despite, they canonized a man who proved to them that faith has its reward in the heart and not in the market. More and more through the centuries of disappointment they were drawn to him as the incarnation of the Jewish spirit. More and more they revered a faith so instinctive and so majestic that it asked for nothing but God. It is recorded that one of the greatest of the Maccabean victories was won through a vision in which he was seen handing the sword to their leader. It is not unlikely that he may have been in the thoughts of the author of the book of Job; and some modern scholars believe that he was the model

for the picture of the Servant of Jehovah in the immortal fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.¹ It seems incredible that Jesus, who knew and applied to himself a prophecy of Isaiah, should not have had his mission made clear to him by those words which helped many men in the first centuries to receive him as the Messiah:—

“Surely he bore our griefs,
And carried our sorrows:
Yet we did esteem him stricken,
Smitten of God and afflicted.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon him;
And with his stripes we are healed.”

It is then by no means impossible to connect Jeremiah with Calvary; and we are not astonished to find that Jesus was mistaken, by one who revered him greatly, for the prophet Jeremiah, risen from the dead.

If any one wants to receive the grace of humility, “the highest virtue, mother of them all,” and to recover the fading glory of reverence, I

¹ Cf., for example, Cornill, “Das Buch Jeremia,” 1905.

know no surer method than by living in the atmosphere of the Old Testament, with men like Moses and Isaiah, Barak and Elijah, David and Jeremiah, with men who convince us that the noblest character, both in modern and in ancient times, is that which tremblingly confesses that it is the product of the Spirit of God. The two men of whom I have written are, of course, far too great for my words to actualize. But no man of moral perception and of spiritual longing can study for six months the books of Samuel or the prophecies of Jeremiah without getting a new heart or at least a new song.

This transcendent service of the Old Testament, in presenting to us personalities that incite profound reverence, is as enduring as virtue and is utterly independent of changing scientific and philosophical views.

The second permanent religious service that the Old Testament renders mankind is to record the discovery of the most fundamental truths of our religion.

The modern study of history has shattered two widespread notions of the origin of religion. The older of these held that God revealed in the centuries between Adam and Moses the entire content of religion. The main significance of Christ was that he revealed more clearly and in final form what had been in the minds of the Patriarchs and of Moses. The primitive practices of the period of the Judges and of great heroes like Gideon and David were either not clearly understood — fixed ideas are opaque glasses through which to read history — or explained as wilful departures from the ethical monotheism of the primitive times. It is only quite recently that the discovery has been made that the reason for a higher conception of God in parts of Genesis than in parts of Samuel lies in the fact that they were written later. Our fathers are not to be blamed for their opinions. They were but following the lead of the Hebrew editors of the Pentateuch, who themselves credited the patriarchs with the conceptions of the prophets and of Ezra. They were sure that the omnipotent God would not have withheld

from his favorites the sublime truths which these editors assumed them to be capable of grasping. But it has now been conclusively proven that the Hebrew religion, which we have inherited, is a product of long development rather than a revelation to three or four men at the dawn, or before the dawn, of history.

The other theory of religion that has been shattered lies embedded in the phrase "Natural Religion" and has, perhaps, its most conspicuous representative in the person of Rousseau. It is the theory held in common by the Deists of England and by the theologians of the German Aufklärung. It postulated that a righteous and merciful God, a high sense of moral obligation, and the hope of immortality were the property of mankind at creation; that, while not given by special revelation, as the older theologians surmised, they were an inalienable part of the constitution of the race. To recover the true religion, it was necessary only to remove the débris of history and disclose the heart of primitive man. But an intelligent study of the Hebrew Scriptures alone is enough to show that

this is utterly false. The hope of immortality is clearly a late conception among the Jews, and the sublime Jehovah of the prophets was as unknown to Samson as to Agamemnon.

Our God is a Being gradually discovered by the tremendous struggles of the men whose lives and whose glorious enthusiasm on emergence into the light the Old Testament alone of all books describes. This is the reason why the Old Testament will endure and will be indispensable in the creation of character forever. No religious truth can be grasped by the intellect. To be discovered in its essential grandeur, it must be seen by the eyes of the heart. It is only the Old Testament that enables us to appreciate the moral worth of the truths of our religion, because only through it may we enter into the enthusiasm and witness the moral transformation of those majestic souls who discovered these truths.

Let us take, for example, the sovereignty of God. We take it for granted and fancy we understand its significance. But until, through

48 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

the mediation of the Old Testament, we stand close by the man who made it the eternal property of the race, we no more understand its supporting pillars and its tremendous proportions than the foolish Israelites of the court of Jeroboam II. They believed in the power of Jehovah. Under Jeroboam their country had advanced very greatly in extent and power. The court was full of prophets who assured them of the approach of the Day of Jehovah, in which Israel should rule over the proud kingdoms that had oppressed them and Jehovah over the boasting gods of the nations. They believed in the might of Jehovah because it was traditional to believe therein and because recent events in history gave color to such belief. So we may believe in the sovereignty of God because we read it in the creeds and because there are certain mental and historical facts that bear it out. But until we have joined the crowd over which Amos, with the enthusiasm of a discoverer, thundered forth the truth, until we have been mastered by the majesty of his soul, and entered wonderingly into sympathy with his

sublime revelation, we do not understand the sovereignty of God. Before Amos, the Old Testament is the book of God; after him, it is the book of Almighty God. Before him, it was the great record of men striving to find a holy God; after him it is the record of men who had found him. The Old Testament after Amos is rocked and swayed by the colossal discovery of that moral world that is created by the idea of the Unity of God. He is the first prophet whose words have, some of them, come to us in their original form. The crashing thunderous numbers of Hebrew prophecy seem, therefore, quarried from the soul of the man who rose to such a conception of the holiness of Jehovah that he was forced to give over the whole world to his rule. To the Israelites reposing in their sole election by Jehovah he announces:

“You alone have I known of all the tribes of the earth,
Therefore from you will I have satisfaction for all
your iniquities.”

To the men who granted Jehovah some power in nature, he proclaimed:—

“For Adonai Jahveh of Hosts —
 He toucheth the earth and it melteth
 And all its inhabitants mourn;
 He buildeth his chambers in heaven
 And foundeth his vault upon earth;
 For the waters of ocean he calleth
 And poureth them over earth’s surface;
 Jahveh is his name.”¹

Irritated beyond poetic measure by the arrogance of the provincials, Amos in the midst of his glorious wrath gives birth to absolute monotheism in that stinging sentence: “Are ye not as the Ethiopian children to me, ye children of Israel? Have I not brought up not only Israel from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?” I am the God of your enemy as well as of yourselves.

What was it in the soul of this man that startled the earth into a new epoch and eventually gave the world to his God? Who shall say? But that it was moral splendor that was the creator of this religious faith, these words

¹ I have not seen my way clear to subscribe to the almost universal opinion that the “Nature-Poems” of Amos are later interpolations.

reveal, poured forth to a very religious folk in the midst of their ceremonies:—

“Woe to those eager for the Day of Jahveh!
What is it to you, that Day of Jahveh?
That Day shall be darkness; it shall not be light,
Yea, sunless gloom, and not glittering splendor!

“Your feasts I hate, I despise.
Your festal assemblies I loathe.
The noise of thy songs remove.
Thy harp-music let me not hear:
As waters let justice run down,
Uprightness as a stream never failing.”

Monotheism could arise only from a perfectly unified experience that felt about it the constraint of the inevitable. The only pillars that can carry so tremendous a structure as monotheism are moral monoliths. And it tolerates no others. Amos was the spiritual father of Kant. The philosopher set himself to the demolition of the arguments of the metaphysicians for the existence of God because he saw that they were incapable of so great a task. Then upon the imperative of his moral nature he built again the walls to carry the faith of humanity. But in so doing he was only revert-

ing to Amos, who, ignorant of the arguments that Kant discarded and a stranger to the long centuries of moral endeavor that produced the philosopher, found God, twenty-five hundred years earlier, just as confidently out of the strength and imperiousness of his vision of righteousness. Although he did not know it, the greatest of philosophers was but confirming the discovery of the first great Hebrew prophet. To apprehend monotheism we must realize the solidity of the foundation stones on which it is builded, and these lie disclosed in no laboriously wrought system of thought, but, fresh-hewn and rugged, only in the strophes of the book of the prophet Amos.

Take once more — for we can only touch the borders of our vast subject — the conception of the love of God. No more than the sovereignty of God was it the property of man either by nature or by revelation at the outset. Like that conception, it had a long prenatal history in the womb of the race. But like that also, it came into life at one point in the history of our religion. And that point is to be

found not in the speculations of the theologian, not in the ritual of the temple, not in the rapture of spring-time nor in the common joy of harvest, but in the heart of a man who was made a prophet by the persistence of his love for a faithless wife. For not as an allegory, whose rise would then be unexplainable, but as the most literal fact, do I, in company with many modern writers, regard the pathetic story of the prophet Hosea.

In the company of Hosea, we do not, in the phrase of Jeremy Taylor, have to practise the presence of God. Released from our own imaginations and from all mystical exercises of our spirits, we immediately are ushered into the audience room of the Eternal. Living in the same great eighth century before Christ, a younger contemporary of Amos, he caught the righteousness of the earlier prophet to his heart and warmed it there with love. In Hosea, the deepest personal grief of man becomes the means of creating the conception of a righteous God, who loves sinners. Hosea was not the first man who had an unfaithful wife, nor the

first, who, after discovering her unfaithfulness, still loved her with jealous and animal devotion. But, so far as we know, he was the first who loved so impure a woman with so pure an affection. Hosea did not cast off Gomer as King Arthur did Guinevere. His love refused to let her go. Through the long years of her harlotry he pursued her, and, when all her gay lovers had forsaken her, he took her into his home, buying her in open market as a slave. And after all is done and the inevitable redemption accomplished, this humble victor out of the profound depths of his life perceives his love to be a symbol of God's own. Hosea is forced with joy to confess that his love for Gomer is no more patient and certainly can be no more triumphant than Jehovah's for Israel. It is a misfortune that the prophecies of Hosea have come to us in so corrupt a text and weighted down with so many additions. But every now and then a few lines of exquisite beauty are revealed. The second chapter of the book, though sadly marred, is full of the lyrical tenderness we might expect in the poem which is

the record of man's discovery of the changeless love of God. Mindful of the way of his own love, he reveals God's method of redeeming Israel in words which he does not hesitate to lay in the very mouth of God himself.

“Behold, I will hedge her way with thorns
And fence her about with walls
So that she may not find her paths.
She shall pursue her lovers,
But she shall not overtake them.
In vain shall she seek them.
Then, behold, I will allure her,
I will lead her to the wilderness,
I will speak home to her heart,
And *there* will I give her vineyards,
The vale of Achor as a gate of hope.
As in her youth will she answer me,
As in the days when she came out of Egypt.”

Hosea is not content with the revenge of the Almighty; his love has taught him the emptiness of such a victory as Amos would have God win; he is content with nothing less than redemption, and knowing that love cannot degrade, he sets forth God as the wooer of shameless Israel. Thus doth human love reveal its right in the holy of holies. The lot of Hosea

was cast in evil times, and, like all the prophets, he is forced to denunciation; but through all the attacks on idolatry and iniquity in the remainder of the book we find the plaintive note recurring again and again. It is thus that the Almighty utters himself:—

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him;
It was I that taught him to walk;
I took him in my arms.

“How can I give thee up, Ephraim,
How shall I abandon thee, Israel?
How make of thee an Admah?
How let thee share Zeboim’s fate?
My heart is changed within me,
My compassions are kindled together.
I will not act in burning wrath;
I will not set out to destroy Ephraim.
For God am I and no man.

“I will heal their faithlessness,
I will love them freely.”

Here we may feel something of the wonder and the transport that dwelt in the man whose love for a woman was so holy that he started a whole race on its great journey to the heart of God. Only as a man stands by the wondering

prophet can he grasp the significance of believing in the love of God.

Amos and Hosea are conspicuous, but after all typical, examples of the service of the Old Testament in revealing to men the full significance of the essential elements of our religion. And even where the great conceptions — for they are not many — do not come to such unique expression out of the lips of distinct individuals, the religious reader is continually conscious of moving in creative times. The Old Testament introduces us to the beginnings of personal communion with God. This is harder to trace than the birth of the great truths of the sovereignty and love of God. While it is true that adumbrations of these ideas are to be found in many parts of the Bible, they may be said to have emerged into the light out of the experience of the prophets Amos and Hosea.

But it is somewhat hard to say when an Israelite first approached God for himself instead of for his nation or as a part of his nation. It is easy to see that at the beginning of

58 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

Israelitish history religion was a national thing; in spite of the curious endeavors of some critics, it is clear that in the Psalter religion is an individual thing. It may indeed be that this tendency never fully revealed itself until Jesus came, but that it had begun in Old Testament times is evident. In the earliest Hebrew song that has come to us, — the “song of Deborah,” — we find individuals singled out for remembrance before Jehovah for their services to his people in war. The grotesque Samson definitely calls upon Jehovah for aid in overthrowing the pillars that uphold the temple of the Philistines. He seems thus early to have dispensed with oracle and image and priest in converse with his God. But we must remember that there are grave doubts as to the meaning and historicity of the story of Samson, even should we not share these doubts ourselves. In any case it is to be noted that Samson called upon Jehovah as the national God to aid him in a deed that would avenge his people. But with David we come upon one whose individuality was so powerful that he called upon Jeho-

vah, not merely for aid in national crises, but for relief in his own personal sorrows. It is true that in national concerns he employed a priest to consult a tenderly prized oracle to discover the issues of war. In his pursuit by Saul, too, his actions were governed by the outcome of Abiathar's consultation of the ephod; but at least twice the need of his heart was so great that he dared to ignore all priestly sentries in his approach to the presence of his God. He loved a child so much that he prayed and fasted many days in the hope that Jehovah would spare its life, evidently not for the sake of Israel, but for the sake of his love. And, although he danced before the ark on its return to Jerusalem because he believed that he was then dancing before Jehovah, we nevertheless find him believing that God would save his life, if he so pleased, even though the ark was in the possession of his enemy. It appears therefore that, at the great crises of his life, he felt that neither God nor he was bound by ecclesiastical machinery.¹

¹ It must be recognized, however, that no actual prayer of his has been preserved, and that the phrase in 2 Samuel 12¹⁶,

60 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

In the story of Elijah, again of uncertain date and embellished with legendary additions, we find that its author believed Jehovah to be concerned about the life of the prophet, and that he thought it natural for the prophet to beseech God to make good to a woman the kindness she had shown him. But with Jeremiah, the personal communion of God enters on a deeper phase. He does not simply beseech God for his life. He throws himself upon God and pours out his soul before him. Wellhausen is not far wrong when he says: "In the midst of his pain and agony, there arose the certainty of his personal communion with the Deity; the deepest essence of personal religion was set free through him. He is the father of true prayer in which the frail soul expresses its less than human ¹ misery and its more than human confidence." ² He bears the indignities from his people and scorns the treasures that "he besought God for the child," may not be meant as spiritually as we suppose; he may even then have besought him through an ephod.

¹ *Untermenschliches*.

² "Israelitische and Jüdische Geschichte," 1901, p. 147.

have blinded their eyes, in order that he may still hear the speech of God. He is the first Israelite whose personal prayers, written by himself in the midst of his prophecies for the nation, have come down to us. He laments his loneliness and his fate, evidently feels the distinction between himself and his people, and apparently intercedes for them. His soul is so completely filled with the majesty of being the mouthpiece of God that he cannot but pour out his complaints before him. And we feel that from these outpourings of soul he goes back to his task strengthened and uplifted.

Yet communion is still imperfect. There is no real joy in God; only a sense of his righteousness and his irresistible power over the nation and over the prophet's will. It is still only the nation that is immortal, only Israel that is the real object of the plan of God. Had Jeremiah not been engrossed in the fate of his nation, he might have felt that sense of the injustice of God in his dealings with himself that comes to the surface in the Psalms and in the Book of Job. Only when the soul is im-

mortal and stands before the eternal God can real communion exist; only then are joy and faith possible. But the Jews were pushed onward toward the belief in immortality largely by the necessity of discriminating between the men who served God and those that scoffed at him. And it was undoubtedly the prophets who, looming so large before them, and so differently estimated by various groups of the people, forced the emphasis from national success to individual faithfulness to God and to righteousness.

A long development preceded the Lord's Prayer, and the two throw light on each other. It is only we who have the Lord's Prayer that can rightly estimate the long tarrying in the outskirts of prayer, it is only we who can see the vastness of the contribution these men were making to human life; on the other hand, the Lord's Prayer is even more gratefully offered when we realize both the silence and the stammering that preceded it. It is only as we share the struggle after truth and the enthusiasm at its initial discovery, it is

only as we apprehend the grandeur of the men out of whose hearts the foundation stones of our religion were quarried, that we apprehend the significance of the truth and the holiness of our faith.

The Old Testament permits us thus to stand at the cradle of the great fundamental ideas that have sanctified human life. They are now so ingrained in the texture of humanity that it is hard to believe that they were not always there. It is but recently that historical criticism has let us a little way into the secret of their discovery. In comparison with the conception of the unity of God, of the changeless tenderness of his love and of the imperativeness of duty, all other ideas are secondary. It is the Old Testament alone which enables the soul to partake in the discovery of the great foundations upon which Jesus Christ so confidently erected the Kingdom of God.

But the question may well be raised: Why is it necessary for us, who, whatever our peculiar intellectual mood at the moment may be,

64 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

form our lives and are ruled in our spirits by these ideas, — why is it necessary for us to read continually of the record of their discovery? We do not find it necessary to our intellectual development to be forever reading Darwin and Koch and the diaries of Columbus; why should it be necessary to our religious development to be constantly reading the Old Testament?

The answer has already been partly given. For it is clear that the stuff out of which Columbus and Koch and Darwin made their discoveries — the face of nature — is still the object of attentive study by all who are interested in their discoveries; they must verify them for themselves. But the stuff out of which the great spiritual discoveries were made is the souls of the discoverers, of the men whose records are preserved in the pages of the Old Testament. It was the soul of Amos from which the conception of a righteous God was taken; it was the suffering love of Hosea for his sinful wife that was the stuff in which the love of God was first discovered; it was

the heart of Jesus Christ that gave rise to the final conception of the Fatherhood of God. Religious discoveries are wholly personal; they are made by men from their own hearts; and in reliance on what is written there, they defy the world.

One of the surest methods of verification of spiritual truth is close understanding of the souls that were profound and pure enough to disclose it. A scientific discovery may be perfected by the generations which succeed the discoverer; a religious discovery is always clearest and mightiest in the soul of the discoverer; indeed we may in a sense assert that whereas a scientific truth may be verified, a religious truth must be imparted. That is doubtless the underlying meaning of the Sacrament, which the author of the fourth gospel so profoundly expressed in the words: "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in yourselves." The only method of obtaining the belief of Jesus is to share his Spirit. If this be so, the unique religious value of the Old Testament

is clearly seen and is well-nigh impossible to overestimate. In recording the discoveries of the fundamental truths of our religion, it preserves in a very important sense the truths themselves.

The third great service that the Old Testament renders mankind is that it affords the presuppositions that are indispensable to apprehend the character of Christ. It is the Old Testament religion that Christ came to fulfil. It is as necessary to understand what the material was which Christ completed as the method of his completion. Christ was addressing a definite situation. It was a nation of very strong and definite religious conviction to which he spoke. We do not understand him unless we understand the effect which his words produced upon the people to whom they were uttered. It is impossible to gain a complete idea of Jesus and his purposes from the Gospels alone. We must understand the problems of his own time and the deepest spirit of his race. To understand the Christian ideal, it is almost

as essential to appreciate what Jesus took for granted as what he felt it necessary to add. His God was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He had come, not to destroy, but to fulfil. He was put to death because he claimed to be the one in whom the hopes of the prophets culminated.

It is as impossible, therefore, to understand the purpose and spirit of Jesus without something of his reverence for the Old Testament and something of his intimacy with it, as it would be to understand a proposed amendment to a constitution without a knowledge of the original constitution, or to comprehend an advanced course in physics without studying the elementary laws of heat and light. The most fatal misapprehensions of Jesus are those that fail to see the spirit of the Old Testament in all his ideas and deeds. All his words of grace and love are caricatured in our apprehension of them unless we remember that they were addressed to a people that hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He was still insistent that it was to destruction that the easy way led.

68 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

The errors that he corrected in the Old Testament were created by searching for substitutes for righteousness, not by undue insistence thereon. He came to bestow upon men a power to attain righteousness that the scribes had missed. He was the Messiah of the Jews, because he revealed to men the splendor of righteousness and because he planted it in their hearts.

The old commentators were right in believing that Jesus fulfilled prophecy; they were wrong in not placing the emphasis upon the fundamental in prophecy, but upon mere accidents of verbiage or of foretelling. What was the reason why Jesus appeared in Palestine rather than in India or in Japan? The reason is the Old Testament. The reason is that in Israel men sought communion with God and that they sought it through the discovery and the doing of his will. From beginning to end the Old Testament is a book of a great moral emotion. It is not content with contemplation. It knows nothing of the immanence of God. It seeks with might and with unparalleled grandeur the

conformity of human will to the divine. The possibility and delight of such conformity is the inspiration of the prophet and the experience of the psalmist. Morality is not a social order, it is the invitation of a wise and merciful God to a feast.

And yet the careful reading of the Old Testament makes it evident also that in turning from it to the New Testament we are turning to a new religion. It not only helps us to an appreciation of Jesus by revealing to us the moral foundations on which he built, but it allows us to apprehend that individual contribution of his to the Jewish religion that made it the religion of mankind.

It should be said immediately that it is hard to prove that Jesus introduced any absolutely new religious conception. He himself felt that he was not revolutionizing, but completing. He was conscious of breaking at serious points with the religion of his times, but he was also insistent that the religion of his times was a degenerate form of the religion of the Old Testament. To the teachers of his day he said,

“Ye have made the word of God of none effect through your tradition.” The Old Testament was his refuge in temptation and the keeping of its commandments was the method he recommended to obtain eternal life. In it we find the central truths of his gospel either clearly uttered by some rare man, or at least suggested. If we think of Jesus as demanding mercy rather than sacrifice, we find that he was anticipated by Amos and by Micah; if we think of him as emphasizing the love of God rather than the struggles of man after righteousness, we find Hosea doing the same; if we think of him as rejoicing in present personal trust on God rather than in expectation of national purification and supremacy, we can say no less of the author of the twenty-third Psalm; if we realize that he lived in an inner and eternal world, we see in the seventy-third Psalm the ecstasy of one of the earliest venture-some believers in immortality, and we find the belief in immortality widespread among the Jews when Jesus came; if we think of his wonderful declaration of the fatherly attitude of God,

we find a dim suggestion of it in Isaiah, as applied to a group of Israelites, though for a clear belief in it as applied to individuals we must look to the Apocrypha;¹ if, finally, we remember his summary of the moral law and his refusal to separate the love of God from the love of man, we discover an unusually close parallel in Jeremiah's summary of Josiah's life, which he addressed to Josiah's scoffing son: "Did not thy father eat and drink and do justice? then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and the needy; then it was well. Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?" It is no wonder that he said: "I am come not to destroy but to fulfil."

And yet on the other hand we have but to read the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew to find that Jesus did not regard the Old Testament as the infallible and final word of God to men. He did not bow to it as his authority; he deliberately corrected it and substituted words of his own for sacred commands of the law. With all its insight and sanctity,

¹ Wisdom of Solomon 2 12-24.

he knew something holier, the judgment of his own soul. He was not dependent upon the Old Testament; he did not hesitate to say that while the prophets were the servants of God, he was his son.¹ He rejoiced in the suggestions that the Old Testament offered of the truth of his own heart, but he found them in his heart more clear and more spontaneous and more compelling than in the book.

It is a truism to assert that every man has one original contribution that he makes to religion, namely, his own personality. And yet the original element in Christianity is the personality of Christ. His personality is recognized as absolutely supreme in the annals of history and stands before men with the value of God. From it there is no appeal; to his teaching there is no need to add; no one dreams of "fulfilling" his religion. He seems to have attracted to himself all the noblest traits of the deepest seers of the Old Testament and to have rejected all their imperfections. And yet there is no suggestion of borrowing. The whole na-

¹ Mark 12 1-12.

tion seems to have groaned and travailed together to produce him. He seems to be the incarnation of the Spirit that had feebly and transiently touched one and another of the loftiest souls of Israel. In his person all the loftiest impulses of the prophets and psalmists are blended in such a perfect harmony that it is hard to believe we have ever been moved by them, even singly, before. It does not seem to express the truth to say that he made these different impulses his own; they seem to have *been* his own from the beginning; he has no acquisitions; truth was native to him, because he was pure in heart. Although coming at the end of Jewish history, he seems the fountain from which the prophets have drawn. We remember the profound word attributed to him in the fourth gospel: "Before Abraham was, I am." The word is true, if divested of crass realism; there is no other word that seems so adequate.

It is futile to analyze his person; it is misleading to put him into opposition with the book that he completed or with the impulses of the

individuals which he fulfilled or with the teachings of the prophets, which all find their significance as they take their place in his full-orbed utterances. He includes; that is his method of correction; he does not oppose. It is a new emphasis that we detect in his gospel rather than a new truth, a new emphasis that finds its explanation and its significance in his character. And yet with him we enter a different world. Such is the power of his person.

With this explanation, with the consciousness that the great secret of Jesus' relation to God and to men can never be explained, it is, perhaps, not out of place to say that Jesus laid a new emphasis on the individual as distinguished from the nation, on the inner as distinguished from the outer, on the present as distinguished from the future.

The Old Testament is a book of such unique power that we sometimes wonder why it did not redeem the world. After becoming ac-

quainted with Jesus, we see that what it lacked was the supreme character that was his alone. And in his light we see that it never quite shook off the chrysalis out of which it came. The Jews were a nation, constantly expecting dominion and estimating dominion by outward prosperity and power. What they expected God to give was national righteousness and national dominion and national prosperity, and the greatest of the prophets either expected these things also or announced their impossibility as utmost ruin. While in harmony with all their best, Jesus seems to move in a different world from this. It is an inner world; some of the Old Testament writers caught sight of such a world; the authors of the twenty-third and the seventy-third Psalms lived in it for moments; Jesus first showed us what it means to find in converse with God and in the doing of his will the whole of life. He, like Amos and Jeremiah, seems to have believed that Jerusalem was speedily to be destroyed, but it was not the burden of his message as of theirs; it was indeed of so little importance that he referred to it but

rarely, of so little importance that some find it hard to believe that he referred to it at all. What was national life compared with the trust of the individual on God and God directing and loving and controlling the individual? The outer world, outer rewards, outer comforts, outer aims, how little they all mattered to one who saw God! And the future — Jesus derived constant encouragement from its splendor, but when God was to be trusted and served in the present, what need of planning for the future that was secure with God. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The change of emphasis all depends on an inner experience, unexplainable, unparalleled. Jesus and God lived together as Son and Father. God could love no nation as he loved him, as *he* loved this brother of his and that brother of his. As Luther has it, "The worship of God is the service of God, and the service of God is the service of men." I am sure Luther has the emphasis of Christ. It is the service of men, not of man; of the sons and daughters of God, not of the human race. Righteousness is lofty

and somewhat vague, and no individual can claim it. Jesus demands something higher, which seems to be service of those we love — for no man is to go unloved by us. Jesus saved the race by forgetting it in the saving of men. Jesus did not announce principles; he spoke home to the heart of men. A prominent Japanese writer appears to understand the genius of Christianity when he says: "It is as a state and not as a society that we [Japanese] have made progress, and now the time has come to make changes in society. This is dependent on the personal character of those in authority and personal character is best improved or changed by Christianity."¹

The Old Testament impresses us as a book of longing, the New as a book of joy; the Old Testament as a book of national righteousness and national faith, the New as a book of individual men, set face to face with God by an individual man; the Old Testament as a book of a great ambition,

¹ Dr. Nitobe, in "Bushido," quoted by Rev. Morton Dunning in "The Need of the World," Boston, 1906.

78 RELIGIOUS VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT

the New as a book of a great sacrifice. But in the last analysis, the difference lies in the character of Christ. It is this character which the failure of the Old Testament to redeem the world emphasizes, a character, however, deeply reverent toward the book which it alone made "Old."

VI

CONCLUSION

I CHERISH the hope that enough has been adduced to prove that modern scholarship, far from being a foe to religion, is its servant. These religious goods that I have mentioned are very simple — otherwise they would not be of high religious value. But they have been clearly offered only by modern scholarship. It alone has sketched the times of these widely separated individuals with sufficient clearness of outline to enable us to sympathize with the individuals themselves; only recently have they become real men with power to grip our souls. Modern scholarship alone has demonstrated that the great truths of religion have been actually discovered in the course of history. It has enabled us to stand reverently at the birth hours of those sublime conceptions on which the world of moral thought and religious splendor

is founded. It alone has aroused that historical understanding of the times of Jesus which has allowed us to perceive the Hebrew spirit in the Son of God. It alone has shattered the shocking limitations of the older view to which I have alluded. It has shown us that the Old Testament is God's great means for making us acquainted with him rather than a sure proof that he is, but that we can never know him well.

The religious value of the Old Testament consists in too many things for us even to mention them, but it at least may be said to consist partially in these that I have named. The Old Testament presents to our souls characters that are supremely worthy of our reverence because consciously centred in God and full of his power. It permits us to share the enthusiasm of the men who discovered the fundamentals of our religion and the character of our God. It is indispensable to complete discipleship of Christ, because it is the creator of the mould which his soul expanded.

Higher values than these, religiously, there are not. No man save Jesus ever had the right to lay the book that offered these aside. And he made it immortal.

MAR 8 1907

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: June 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

BS
1171
✓

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 327 715 A

